

Confidential



DIRECTORATE OF
INTELLIGENCE

Intelligence Memorandum

CHANGING POLITICAL SCENE IN INDIA

Confidential

24

20 March 1967
No. 0800/67

WARNING

This document contains information affecting the national defense of the United States, within the meaning of Title 18, sections 793 and 794, of the US Code, as amended. Its transmission or revelation of its contents to or receipt by an unauthorized person is prohibited by law.

GROUP 1 EXCLUDED FROM AUTOMATIC DOWNGRADING AND DECLASSIFICATION

CONFIDENTIAL

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
Directorate of Intelligence
20 March 1967

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

Changing Political Scene in India

Summary

The recently held Indian general election reveals a changed political atmosphere in the country. The Congress Party, which has ruled so long, suffered substantial setbacks on both the national and state levels. Nevertheless, it remains the only party with nationwide support. No distinct new trend to the right or left in Indian politics is indicated by the election results. Congress' substantial losses appear to have resulted more from a strong protest against the slow progress during 20 years of Congress rule than from an acceptance of the various ideologies of the splintered opposition.

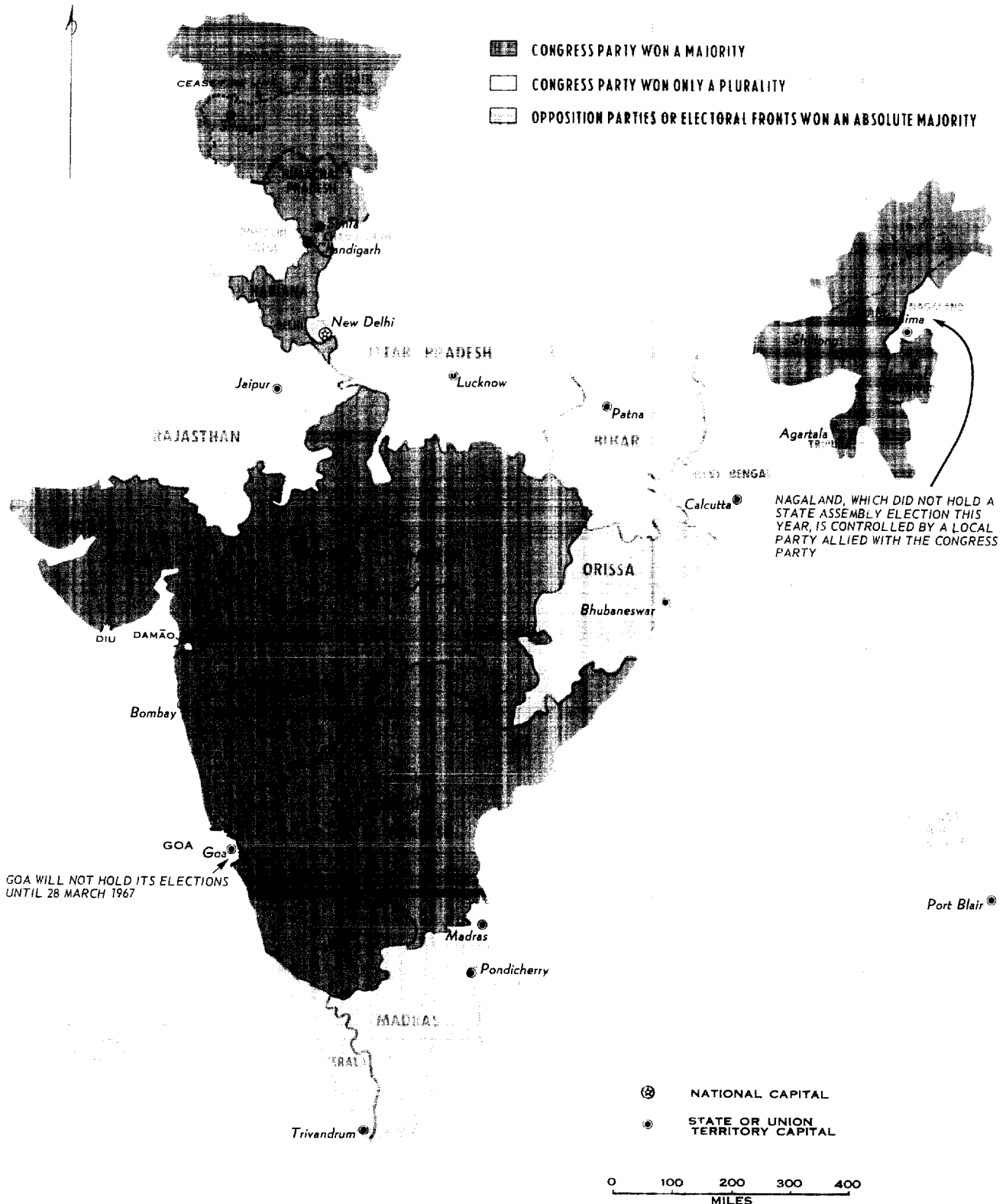
Political instability, especially at the state level, can be expected in the short run. Over a longer period of time, however, this need not necessarily be the case. Much will depend on internal developments within the Congress Party itself, as well as on developments within the opposition camp.

NOTE: This memorandum was produced solely by CIA. It was prepared by the Office of Current Intelligence and coordinated with the Office of National Estimates.

CONFIDENTIAL

INDIA

Outcome of February 1967 State Elections



CONFIDENTIAL

Background

1. In the first nationwide general election since the death of Jawaharlal Nehru in 1964, the Indian National Congress (Congress Party) was stripped of the commanding parliamentary majority it had maintained since India's independence in 1947. Nearly complete returns for the enlarged lower house of the national parliament (Lok Sabha) reveal that Congress will control only about 55 percent of the 523 members. Although never able to win more than about 48 percent of the popular vote, Congress in the previous three contests got over 70 percent of the Lok Sabha seats. Congress' popular vote slipped from about 45 percent in the last election in 1962 to about 39 percent this year.

2. The opposition in parliament, although considerably strengthened, is still splintered and divided along ideological lines. The major right-wing opposition parties--the Hindu nationalist Jan Sangh and the conservative free-enterprise Swatantra--scored the biggest gains, but show little evidence of a willingness to cooperate at the national level and each has less than ten percent of the Lok Sabha seats. The two rival Communist parties also improved somewhat on their previous limited representation, but lagged considerably behind the right-wing forces. Leaders of the two parties have already said they would not cooperate with each other in parliamentary matters.

3. In the 16 state elections where the opposition parties tended to concentrate their resources, Congress suffered even more humiliating setbacks, failing to win a majority in half of the contests (see map). Here again, however, Congress' losses were not primarily at the hands of any one party or political grouping. Rightists, nationalists, regionalists, and leftists climbed aboard the anti-Congress bandwagon and benefited to varying degrees.

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

RESULTS OF LOK SABHA ELECTIONS--1962 and 1967

<u>Party</u>	<u>1962</u>	<u>1967</u>
Congress	361	282
Communists (CPI/R)	--	23
Communists (CPI/L)	29	19
Swatantra	22	44
Jan Sangh	14	34
Praja Socialists (PSP)	12	13
Samyukta Socialists (SSP)	6	23
Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK)	7	25
Independents and Other Parties	43	52
Undecided	--	9
Totals	494	521

Causes and Effects

4. No single reason adequately explains the decline of Congress Party influence over the largely illiterate and rural Indian electorate which exercised its franchise to a greater extent than ever before. The 150 million or so Indians who went to the polls--about 60 percent of the electorate--voted for the candidates of their choice for a variety of personal and probably highly subjective reasons. Nevertheless, several elements can be isolated that undoubtedly conditioned the voters' thinking.

5. Since the last general election, India has suffered a number of jolting experiences that have had a profound impact on the country. The Chinese Communist attack in 1962, the death of Jawaharlal Nehru in 1964, the inconclusive armed clashes with Pakistan in the spring and fall of 1965, and the sudden death of Nehru's successor, Lal Bahadur Shastri, all contributed to a change in the political atmosphere. Even more important, however, especially in terms of fomenting dissatisfaction throughout a cross-section of Indian society, have been a sharp and continuing inflation, substantial unemployment, and repeated setbacks in agricultural production.

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

6. The political atmosphere has been most profoundly affected, however, by the specter of famine that has haunted a growing number of Indians over the last two years. The population explosion--about 12 million additional Indians a year--has in good crop years all but cancelled out modest gains in food production, and the last two monsoons have failed to materialize in several sections of India. Most Indians, despite substantial food assistance from abroad, have less to eat today than they did five years ago.

7. As a result, there appears to have been a gradual erosion of confidence in the government's ability to surmount the country's problems. The Congress Party by its actions and inaction has contributed to this discontent and dissent. Short-sighted leadership--especially in state organizations, some of which were involved in considerable corruption--and preoccupation with internal power struggles apparently prevented a vigorous defense of the Congress record, which by no means is all bad. Much of Congress' campaign was devoted to appeals based on the party's role in the independence movement, and the party's claim that only it can provide a new era of plenty under a stable and effective government. This approach, which produced satisfactory results in the past, seems to have been no longer effective in many areas. The politically aware Indian has become increasingly cynical over Congress' promises of a better life and less impressed with what Congress did to get India its independence from the British. The era has passed when Congress Party "freedom fighters" could command widespread loyalty on this basis alone.

8. The opposition elements, which over the years have learned their political lessons well from Congress, demonstrated a much-improved capacity for organization and tactics in the 1967 elections. In numerous instances they were able to get more seats with about the same proportion of the popular vote. In Kerala, for instance, Congress even improved slightly on its percentage of the popular vote but, because of shrewd maneuvering of the electoral front led by the Peking-oriented Communists (CPI/L), Congress lost far more contests than would normally

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

have been indicated by its proportion of the vote. In Madras, the regionalist DMK increased its representation in both the state and national legislatures far out of proportion to the increase in its popular vote.

9. The results of the state and national elections can thus be viewed more as a strong protest against Congress that as a mandate for the vociferous opposition. No clear right or left trend in Indian politics emerged. Both the right and the left benefited from Congress' vulnerability, with the strongest and most adept opposition parties in any given area reaping the biggest gains. In Kerala, Madras, Orissa, and the district of New Delhi, Congress suffered humiliating defeats at the hands of, respectively, the Communists, regionalists, conservatives, and Hindu nationalists. In five other states--West Bengal, Bihar, Punjabi Suba, Uttar Pradesh, and Rajasthan--parties representing every point on the political spectrum succeeded in reducing Congress majorities to pluralities.

10. The most striking examples of the voters' repudiation of seemingly entrenched Congress regimes were in Madras and West Bengal. The voters of Madras and West Bengal apparently wanted a change from a situation in which skill at manipulation was increasingly substituted for good leadership. Congress Party leaders in both states apparently misjudged the degree of discontent, especially in the countryside which had always been the party's source of strength. Even the opposition leaders seemed surprised at the amount of support they received when all the ballots were finally counted.

11. In West Bengal, the stage for Congress' defeat was set almost a year ago when Congress Party leaders, who had long ago pre-empted the political right and center, concluded that the leftists were hopelessly divided and unable to mount a threat at the polls. The leaders therefore judged the time was appropriate for settling old scores within the party itself because, they assumed, any dissidents would be swept into the political wilderness if they broke with Congress.

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

12. The break did occur, but Congress was unable to smash the rebel Congress group--the Bangla Congress. The dissidents, allied with the waning pro-Moscow Communists (CPI/R) and another small radical leftist party, were able to get about half as many seats as Congress and have now joined in a shaky 13-party coalition government. The election results indicate that in more cases than not, Congress lost heavily in those constituencies where this alternate third force between the discredited Congress Party and the radical CPI/L existed. Where the Bangla Congress alliance was not a factor, Congress usually racked up its traditional majorities. The CPI/L, more determined to ruin the CPI/R than Congress, failed to do so, but remained the largest leftist party in the state and is the largest element in the new West Bengal government.

13. In Madras--long a Congress stronghold--Congress factionalism was not a factor in the startling upset victory engineered by the DMK. However, as in Bengal, the opposition was able to exploit considerable discontent with Congress rule that Congress leaders apparently underestimated. Food prices and a generally rising cost of living were the main elements, although the DMK apparently hit the mark with its regionalist appeals in many cases. Identification with a party that strongly put forth its bias for south India appears to have been especially strong in the cities as well as a growing factor in the countryside. In any event, the DMK--as the only party able to project an image as an alternative to continued Congress rule--gathered in the protest vote.

14. In the north Indian states where Congress failed to win its usual majority but emerged as the largest party--Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Punjabi Suba, and Rajasthan--dissatisfaction with the economic situation and Congress factionalism explain in varying degrees the party's decline. Factionalism and economic discontent were especially acute in drought-stricken Bihar, whose Congress government had one of the poorest administrative records of any Indian state. The same was true to a slightly lesser extent in Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh. In Sikh-dominated Punjabi Suba, religious communalism tended

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

to outrank the economic issue as a primary cause for Congress defeat, although the ever-present Congress factionalism contributed to the results.

15. Congress Party factionalism and economic discontent, combined with an adept opposition, were clearly manifested in Kerala. Written off some time ago by Congress leaders as a lost cause, Kerala produced a landslide victory for a CPI/L-led coalition. Although most observers had expected that the left-wing front would win an absolute majority, the magnitude of its victory was unprecedented.

16. Despite their improved showings in the elections, the major opposition parties were not able to establish nationwide support. The Jan Sangh, despite impressive gains, remains essentially a regional party with popular support only in northern and central India. Even here the Hindu nationalist creed has not yet found deep roots in many areas. Similarly, the conservative Swatantra Party still lacks a broad base. Swatantra did best in those areas where former ruling princes were its main attraction. Its success can be attributed, at least in part, to the failure of Congress leaders to hold the confidence of the people, who then looked to the traditional elites for leadership.

17. The Indian Communists, despite their impressive showings in Kerala and West Bengal, found little popular support elsewhere for their radical approaches. In a year of Congress vulnerability, the performance of the rival Communist parties was unimpressive. Except for some modest gains by the CPI/R in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, their geographical base did not grow. While they were able to increase marginally their combined representation in the Lok Sabha, their popular vote dropped from about 10 percent in 1962 to about 8.3 percent this year. Again, it would appear that the Communists' gains reflect more a protest against Congress than a strong positive attraction to Communism.

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

Prospects

18. After 20 years of virtual one-party government, the Indian democracy appears to be on the verge of evolving into a multiparty political system. The myth of Congress' invincibility has been challenged and destroyed in many areas of the country. The major opposition parties, until now unable to project the image of a reasonable alternative to Congress Party government, have moved--collectively--to within striking distance of Congress' dominant position. It remains to be seen where they can go from here.

19. In the short run, a period of increased political instability and tension can be expected. Direct rule from New Delhi has already been imposed on Rajasthan, where Congress' maneuverings to form a government resulted in considerable opposition-inspired violence. Shaky anti-Congress coalition governments in at least three other states may collapse once the initial flush of victory recedes and old antagonisms surface again.

20. An even more difficult short-run problem involves the relationship between the national government and the states. State-national cooperation is vital to a wide range of policy questions--most notably food policy. Even with Congress control in New Delhi and in almost all the states, the national government was often hard put to achieve broad nationwide cooperation. Now for the first time the Congress will have to deal with a number of state regimes that are strongly anti-Congress. The opposition-run governments presumably will be more aggressive in promoting regional interests and less receptive to cooperating with central government policies. However, some of these non-Congress governments may prove to be more responsible than their electoral campaigning would indicate.

21. Congress, shaken by the election results, may revive itself and re-establish its domination. The party tried to do this after the 1962 election, but failed. The pressure to do so now is much stronger. If Congress proves to be too inflexible

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

and too internally divided to accommodate itself to the new and changing political scene, it is quite possible that the party could be turned out of office even on the national level in the next general election, which must be held by 1972.

22. India's political future thus seems to depend heavily on internal developments within the Congress Party. What up to now appears to have been a growing dissatisfaction among the electorate with Congress government could, over the next five years, turn into a desire to vote a mandate for either the left- or right-wing parties. More likely, however, the further decline of Congress could evolve into a situation characterized by a number of roughly equal parties divided along both ideological and regional lines. Regional interests--always a strong influence in Indian politics--could become even more important. The ability of the major opposition parties to work together to the detriment of Congress will be another key factor shaping the ever-changing Indian political scene.

CONFIDENTIAL

Confidential

Confidential